

Turks undertake a Herculean task for art's sake

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"Our lawyer couldn't even bear to watch," said the 80-year-old archaeologist, an edge of triumph in her frail voice. "There was silence as we all saw the two halves of the statue slowly fit together, made for each other. Finally, our lawyer turned around and gave a long, soft shout of wonder."

Such victories are finally raising the morale of Turks trying to stem the \$200m (£136m) a year haemorrhage of ancient artefacts from a country that claims to have more Roman cities than Italy, more ancient Greek sites than Greece and more than 100,000 tumuli from 36 civilisations.

But Mrs Inan's victory was particularly sweet. She had been excavating at the southern Turkish site of Perge in 1980 when she unearthed an important statue, a prize Second-century AD copy of the *Weary Hercules* by the ancient Greek master sculptor, Lysippos. The top half disappeared, only to surface mysteriously in New York in 1981.

Mrs Inan is far from a Hercules herself and has difficulty seeing or moving. But she was determined not to give up what she calls "my statue", whose photographs decorate the old furniture of her wooden house high on a hill overlooking the Bosphorus waterway.

"When I decide to do something, I do it. I was one of the few foreigners who returned to Berlin in 1939 to finish my archaeological studies. The bombs could not stop me graduating in 1943," she said.

Underestimating Mrs Inan's mettle, the new owners vigorously denied any connection between the two halves of the statue. It was only after numerous comings and goings — and Mrs Inan's agreement to bring over to the United States a full plaster cast of the bottom half — that the experimental fitting could take place last year.

With the truth out, the Turks say Boston is now reconsidering its position. This kind of situation is sending shivers up the spines of museums and collectors all over the world. It is also stimulating a bigger effort to curtail the smuggling of artefacts and cultural objects.

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Canada. To all intents and purposes the convention does not work," said Malcolm Evans, secretary-general of Unidroit, the inter-governmental organisation based in Rome.

At Unesco's request, Mr Evans' Rome-based international legal institute has drafted a new convention that it hopes will be acceptable to both "exporting" and "importing" countries. If a conference due early next year opens it for ratification, two important changes will be made to make recovery easier for aggrieved countries.

First, objects taken from illegal excavations will count as stolen objects, Mr Evans said. And second, the burden of proof will be reversed, with buyers of ancient artefacts having to prove that they did every-

thing from a war chest that he says has \$50m to fight similar cases. "The *Weary Hercules* in Boston cost \$100,000. It may cost them \$2m to defend it. Is it worth it?" he asked.

In this new poker game, the Metropolitan Museum of New York was the first to decide not to call Turkey's bluff. Under threats of law suits, the curators late last year returned the 225-piece *Lydian Hoard* that they had been pretending since the Sixties was eastern Greek, the usual camouflage for material from Turkey.

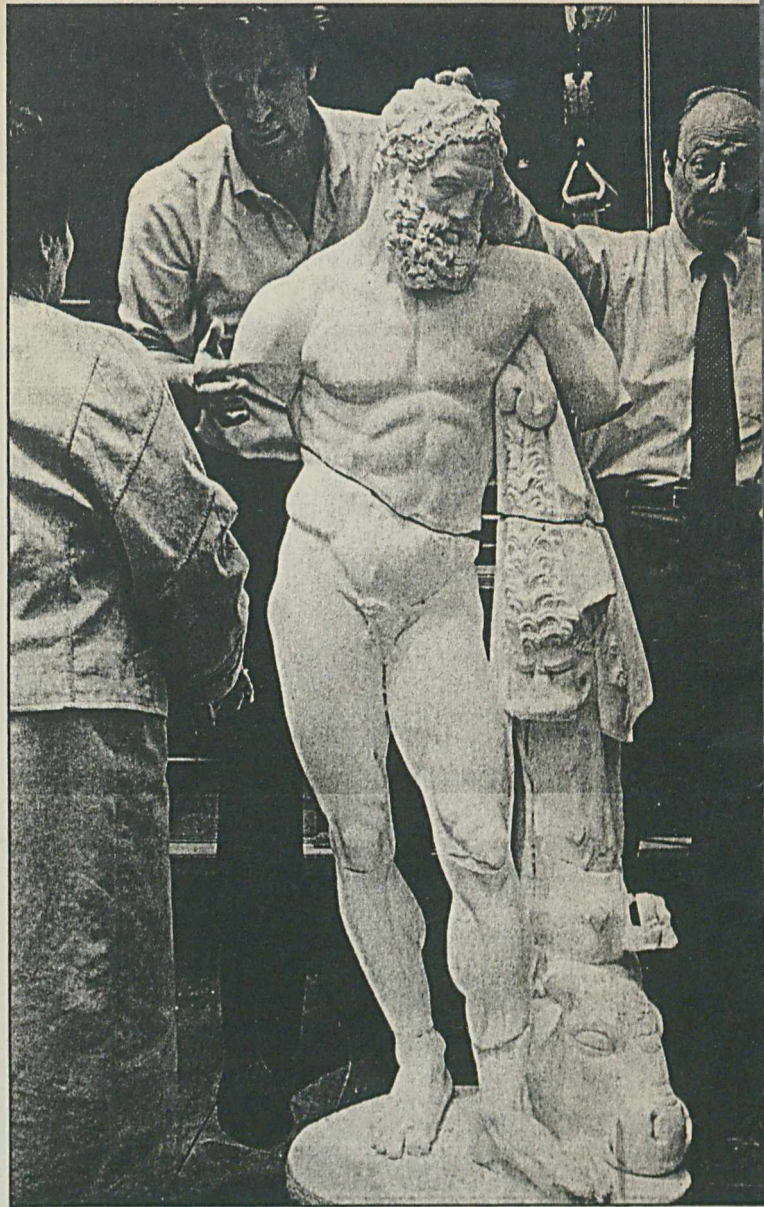
Turkey chooses its ground carefully. No attempts have been made on great treasures in British museums, including the Monument of Xanthos and pieces of two wonders of the ancient world, the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus and the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus.

Most current disputes in Europe are so far with Germany. Mr Ozgen is after material given for restoration to the Berlin State Museum in 1917 but still not returned, including a sphinx that has been built into a wall. A campaign is also building up for the return of the altar of Zeus from Pergamon.

Disputes about treasures and hoards go further than museums. The British archaeologist James Melaart's career was turned upside down when nobody could solve the mystery of the Dorak Treasure he claimed to have seen in the Fifties. American scholars of the Byzantine period have their lives blighted by Turkey's battle with the Dumbarton Oaks museum over the Sion Treasure, a unique collection of silver from a Sixth-century Byzantine monastery.

"If things are returned, in compensation we are ready to give exhibitions and excavation permits. Their curators are welcome to come and work in our museums," Mr Ozgen said in his grand Thirties-style office in Ankara, a suave figure who would not look out of place in European auction rooms — or at a gambling table.

"Otherwise, we are a government. We have the money to pay million-dollar fees to the lawyers. The collectors, the buyers are thinking... what if Turkey comes after us?"



Jale Inan (below left) is fighting to stem the £136m haemorrhaging of ancient artefacts from Turkey in co-operation with Engin Ozgen (below right). The 'Weary Hercules' (above) has been reclaimed Turkey
Main photograph: Turkish Department of Museums and History. Other photographs: Hugh Pope



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Western art-collecting countries might still torpedo the new convention, despite their worries about art thieves exploiting open borders in Europe and a worrying link between drugs and smuggled archaeological objects.

Mr Evans admitted that this new convention might not be in force until the next century, even though he has the evidence right in front of his nose: thieves have stolen nearly all the heads off the statues around his 17th-century headquarters in Rome, the Villa Aldobrandini.

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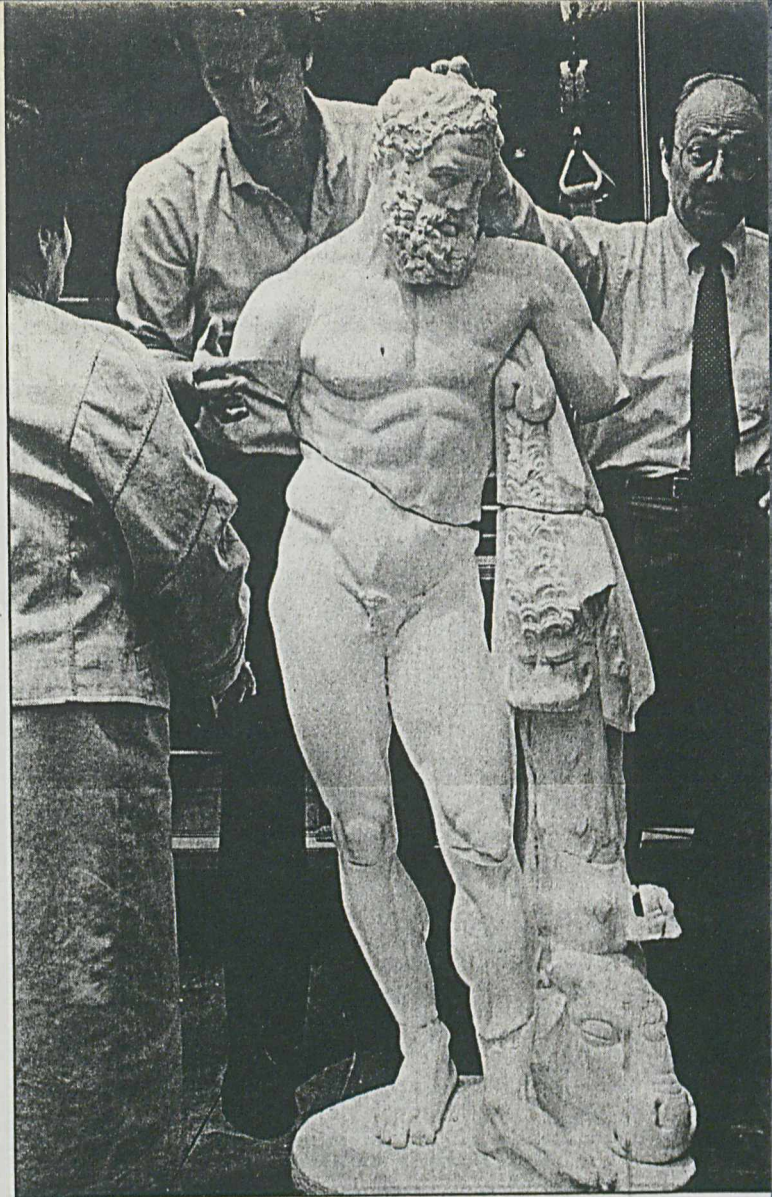
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